

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

Sudbrook Park, located in the Pikesville section of Baltimore County, was designed in 1889 by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr., the founder of and most renowned figure in the profession of landscape architecture in this country (see Appendix A). Sudbrook Park has national, statewide and local historical significance: it is one of only three remaining intact suburban villages that Olmsted, Sr. designed in the United States and his only residential design in Maryland; it was one of Maryland's earliest planned communities; and it was the first community in the State to incorporate comprehensive deed restrictions setting forth land-use and sanitary requirements that predated Baltimore County zoning ordinances by fifty years. From its beginning to the present, Sudbrook Park has been a community imbued with history and suffused with a heritage that residents have sought repeatedly to preserve (see Appendix B).

Olmsted designed Sudbrook as a 204-acre residential community. Today, there are about five hundred families in the area known as "Sudbrook Park," which straddles Sudbrook Lane from the CSX one-lane bridge to the intersection with Milford Mill Road; the present-day community encompasses all but a small area designed by Olmsted, with the addition of the 400 through 700 blocks of Milford Mill Road, across the street from the original community's boundary (see Appendix C). About eighty to ninety acres of the community are listed on the National Register of Historic Sites and Places (also shown on Appendix C). A slightly larger area is a designated Baltimore County Historic District (Appendix D). The present-day community remains entirely residential; the Pikesville commercial district is about a mile away.

From its beginnings as an early Baltimore suburb to the present, Sudbrook Park has demonstrated a cohesive community spirit. As noted by Charles E. Beveridge, Series Editor of *The Papers of Frederick Law Olmsted* and this country's recognized pre-eminent Olmsted scholar:

*Creation of community was the great concern of Frederick Law Olmsted's pioneering career as a landscape architect. . . . In the villages and subdivisions that he planned, Olmsted . . . sought to foster a sense of community and communal life. Sudbrook, Maryland, stands as a prime example of his work in this area.<sup>1</sup>*

There has been an active community association since 1908, when the Sudbrook Company of Baltimore County relinquished daily management of the community and the Sudbrook Improvement Association was formed (the all-male group incorporated in 1942). With the encouragement of the Improvement Association, women in the community formed the Sudbrook Club, Inc. in 1946. Around the mid-1950s, the Improvement Association ceased its activities, most of which had by then been assumed by the Sudbrook Club. For over two decades the Sudbrook Club maintained an active social calendar of events and meetings, worked to insure the strictly residential nature of the community, and assumed sponsorship of holiday parades and events, some of which dated back to the earliest days of the community. In about 1973, the Sudbrook Club changed from a primarily socially-

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<sup>1</sup>From Foreword by Charles E. Beveridge to *Olmsted's Sudbrook: The Making of a Community* by Melanie D. Anson (Baltimore: Sudbrook Park, Inc., 1997), p. vii.



oriented women's club to a civic and social group open to all adults in the community. In 1996, the name of the association was changed to Sudbrook Park, Inc.

From the early 1970s to the present, the community association has been highly visible and vocal in opposing major highway, transportation and public works projects which have threatened to destroy or irreparably weaken Olmsted's design and the historic fabric of Sudbrook Park. Residents successfully defeated a six-lane expressway planned to carve through the community and achieved major victories in preserving their bridge and having the transit line partially tunneled. They are still working to preserve, through rehabilitation, the one-lane bridge with its historic function and purpose, and to restore the landscaping on the community's entranceway triangles to its "pre-transit construction" state using Olmsted's design principles. From its earliest days, the community association has also monitored zoning compliance and fought those zoning changes, both in and around the community, which were antithetical to the purely residential character of Sudbrook Park or might adversely affect the community.

For many decades Sudbrook Park residents prided themselves on being Olmsted's "hidden community" and employed a relatively reactive approach in countering challenges to the community's historic integrity and contemporary vitality. As a result, Sudbrook even today remains unknown to many Baltimoreans (see "Best Little-Known Neighborhood with Big-Name Planning" in "Best of *Baltimore*," *Baltimore* magazine, July 1995). But as residents learned when the community was threatened by the expressway and related rapid transit project, it is far more difficult to preserve a community whose value is not widely recognized. The community, identified by Baltimore County as a Community Conservation Area, was encouraged by the County to develop this Comprehensive Community Action Plan in order to publicly identify its strengths, restore and preserve its historic fabric to the greatest extent possible, obtain necessary funding, secure appropriate formal recognition of its historic significance, and set policies and goals to guide current and future governmental decisions affecting the community.

### **Olmsted's Legacy to Maryland**

Most community plans attempt to protect or direct the selective re-designing of the contemporary community, and if applicable, support the preservation of historic homes. The importance of Sudbrook Park's Plan rests on both of these goals . . . and one more that unites the two: to protect and renew important elements of Olmsted's 1889 Plan for the community as a whole.

Olmsted's vision found expression in an impressive spectrum of settings, from the preservation of uniquely scenic natural areas like Niagara Falls and Yosemite, to picturesque college campuses (American, Amherst, Cornell, Yale and Stanford), private estates (Biltmore in Asheville, N.C.), and suburban villages. He was America's most prominent pioneer in creating picturesquely landscaped urban parks intended not as luxuries for the wealthy but as soothing amenities that would bring together persons of all classes. Beginning in 1858 with New York City's Central Park, Olmsted went on to design major parks and park systems for cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago, Louisville, Montreal and Washington, D.C. (the grounds of the U.S. Capitol).

Simultaneously, Olmsted foresaw the need to provide a respite and relief from the "cramped, confused and controlling circumstances" of cities by creating planned suburban villages "the end of which must be, not a sacrifice of urban conveniences, but their combination with the special charms and substantial advantages of rural conditions of life." When he observed that "no great city can long exist without great suburbs," there were as



yet very few distinct suburbs, at any distance from the city. In 1869 Olmsted and Calvert Vaux designed their first suburban village, Riverside, near Chicago, which became the prototypical nineteenth-century romantic suburb and the model for subsequent early suburban development. Although the 1000-acre Riverside is much larger than Sudbrook, both communities are well-preserved examples of Olmsted's design principles. Atlanta's Druid Hills is the only other surviving suburban village attributable to Olmsted, Sr.

Olmsted's 1889 design for Sudbrook, revolutionary for its time, even today remains a work of art. In an age when arrow-straight streets formed a predictable grid of right-angled intersections, Olmsted designed roads of continuous curvature--a concept so novel that the Sudbrook Company initially could not find any surveyor or engineer to lay them out. His gracefully-curved streets were intended "to suggest and imply leisure, contemplativeness and happy tranquility" in contrast to the "ordinary directness of line in town-streets" which "suggest[ed] eagerness to press forward, without looking to the right or to the left."<sup>2</sup> Olmsted's plan for Sudbrook incorporated 6 other major design principles:

- A distinct approach and entranceway to the community, leading traffic around a tight curve and across a narrow bridge, after which five gracefully curving roads fanned out like streamers to weave through and surround the community;
- Open greenspaces complemented at intersections by landscaped triangles that served as public grounds for informal gatherings of residents;
- An abundance of hardwood trees and other vegetation designed to create a naturalistic effect in the public spaces and along all roads;
- A mix of both larger and smaller sized lots, which was almost unheard of at the time;
- The separation of distracting elements (such as the commuter train that initially served the community) using artful design and natural barriers; and
- Comprehensive deed restrictions -- the first in Maryland -- to protect the master plan, establish sanitary requirements and maintain the residential character of the neighborhood.

As one of the Baltimore metropolitan area's earliest planned suburbs, Sudbrook Park became a model for later suburban development in the region. Later communities that were designed by Olmsted's sons and the firm he founded -- such as portions of Roland Park, Guilford, Homeland, original Northwood, old Dundalk, and Gibson Island -- replicated many of the principles that Olmsted had incorporated in his design of Sudbrook. Subsequent developments in the northwest area of Baltimore County, including Dumbarton, Villa Nova, Lochearn, and Colonial Village, attempted to emulate some of Sudbrook's curvilinear roads.

Today, as suburban sprawl and subdivisions proliferate in Baltimore County, Sudbrook Park remains an example of successful community design that has stood the test of more than a century. In an age when citizens and commentators alike lament the loss of community spirit, and movements such as New Urbanism search for ways to recapture it, Sudbrook Park vividly demonstrates that Olmsted's design created an extraordinary sense of place and community that continues to nurture a strong cohesiveness among residents.

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<sup>2</sup>Olmsted, Vaux & Co., "Preliminary Report Upon the Proposed Suburban Village at Riverside, near Chicago," (New York: Sutton, Bowne & Co., 1868).



## Purpose of this Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan for Sudbrook Park was developed under the auspices of Sudbrook Park, Inc. and Baltimore County government to identify and maintain the community's strengths, assess and address problems, define current and future goals, and recommend actions to implement these goals. Although many of the stated goals are shared by both the Sudbrook Park community and Baltimore County government, some goals and/or actions are specific to one group or the other. Goals and/or actions that are the responsibility of the community, rather than the County, are identified as such in this Plan.

Underlying principles guiding the development of this plan include Sudbrook's status as a National Register and Baltimore County Historic District (discussed previously) and its designation as a Community Conservation Area in the Baltimore County 1989-2000 Master Plan (hereafter referred to as the "Master Plan").

According to the Master Plan (p. 38), community conservation "refers to public and private efforts designed to maintain or enhance the physical, social, and economic resources of the County's older, urban area communities." In conjunction with this designation, a policy in the Master Plan states in pertinent part:

*The quality of life in existing communities should be protected by active, considerate, and cooperative efforts of County government and community improvement organizations. . . . Commercial activities incompatible with local neighborhoods should be restricted in such areas. (Master Plan, pp. 37-38).*

In addition, the current County administration has placed a high priority on preserving and revitalizing the County's older areas. As a recognized Baltimore County Conservation Area and with its historical significance now documented,<sup>3</sup> Sudbrook Park envisions a new paradigm in which the County will work actively and cooperatively with residents in responding to present and future challenges in a way that:

- recognizes Sudbrook Park as a unique suburb that can serve as a model locally and nationally;
- appropriates necessary funding to authentically preserve and/or restore Sudbrook's unique historic features;<sup>4</sup> and
- protects and ensures the continuation of the special quality of life that this community nurtures.

<sup>3</sup>See *Olmsted's Sudbrook: The Making of a Community* by Melanie D. Anson (Baltimore: Sudbrook Park, Inc., 1997), described by the *Baltimore Sun's* James Bready as "simply the most thoroughly and intelligently detailed book yet about a Greater Baltimore neighborhood." (April 26, 1998 Sunday *Sun*, p. 14E)

<sup>4</sup>Baltimore City has authentically restored areas such as Union Square (including pink-tinted sidewalks), and in a current \$1.4 million project to improve Homeland Avenue between Charles Street and York Road, is installing a new road surface, pavements that meander around trees, speed humps, new trees and pressed concrete resembling cobblestone to enhance curbs. See the *Baltimore Sun*, "Filmmakers discover Union Square" by Marilyn McCraven, Oct. 6, 1997 (noting the economic benefits that accrued to the City when Union Square was chosen as the site for a major motion picture) and "Intersection Closes for Repairs after Water Main Break," Sept. 30, 1997, respectively. Authentic cobblestone curbing also was recently installed around one of Roland Park's large triangles.



Like all older communities, Sudbrook Park also faces challenges as it moves into the next century. Its historic and scenic roadways are being threatened by ever-increasing traffic speeds and volume; its gateway entrance and bridge may be at risk; its triangles continue to be nibbled away by new asphalt and, as an aftermath of the rapid transit line construction, they lack the intimate landscaping that Olmsted intended; its public park area has been neglected -- the recreational equipment is outmoded and historically appropriate landscaping is wanting; its water, sewer and storm drain systems need updating in certain areas; its local public elementary and high school fail to attract and retain residents; its Citizens On Patrol, while successful, requires a continuing volunteer effort; and pressures from the growth of surrounding areas periodically raise major zoning threats -- from in-fill development on individual parcels to attempts to develop air-rights over nearby Metro stations. Preserving those positive aspects that make Sudbrook Park such a desirable place to live -- which is the ultimate goal of this Plan -- will require a concerted and on-going effort by residents that is actively supported by Baltimore County.

### **Sudbrook Park's Planning Process**

This comprehensive planning process officially began on October 3, 1996, when five representatives of Sudbrook Park (the "Task Force") met with Second District Councilman Kevin Kamenetz and various Baltimore County representatives to discuss the process and major points to be addressed in a community action plan. On October 7, 1996, Councilman Kamenetz sponsored Resolution No. 87-96, which was adopted by the Baltimore County Council, requesting certain County agencies and community representatives to prepare a Community Action Plan for the Sudbrook Park community (see prefatory pages to this Plan). A subsequent meeting between the Task Force and various County representatives was held on November 19, 1996.

Meetings of the Task Force were held December 9, 1996 and January 26, 1997. After developing a list of key issues to be addressed, the Task Force formed the following seven committees:

- Bridge, Roads and Traffic Committee\*

- Landscaping Committee\*

- Utilities/infrastructure Committee\*

- \*All part of the Historic and Community Preservation Committee

- Land-use and Zoning Committee

- Public Safety Committee

- Public Schools/Education Committee

- Sudbrook Stream Valley Park Committee

The Task Force expanded into the Sudbrook Park Plan Advisory Group (PAG), comprised of the seven committee chairs and two additional members. The PAG was charged with gathering community input and developing the Plan.

The goals and actions set forth in this Plan were formed with input from the community obtained in the course of committee meetings, community meetings and survey responses. The PAG also met and worked with County representatives and engaged in extensive independent investigation in the course of preparing this Plan.

A kick-off community meeting was held on February 10, 1997 at Bedford Elementary School to explain the intent and process of developing a Plan and to seek volunteers. A brief initial survey to elicit input and ideas was distributed and collected. Over fifty persons attended, and many signed up to work on the various committees. Following this meeting, Sudbrook Park, Inc. included information in its newsletters about



the development of the Plan, extending an invitation to residents to serve on committees. The Sudbrook Park neighborhood column, appearing every fifth week in the *Owings Mills Times*, included similar information and requests for volunteers.

Committees met together regularly over the following months and the PAG met on April 12, May 7, June 3 and July 1 (County representatives also attended the latter two meetings, as well as several individual committee meetings). Each committee contributed to the development of a questionnaire which was distributed to all residents the last week of April. One hundred sixty-one residents responded to the survey (a 32% response rate, well-above the 10% "good" rate of most surveys); many wrote extensive comments.

According to the community survey conducted in spring of 1997, residents initially chose, or continue to live in Sudbrook for the following reasons:

Ambiance of trees, winding streets (i.e., Olmsted's design)	84%
Sense of community (also fostered by Olmsted's design)	57%
Nearness to friends, family	45%
Living in/near historic district, homes	44%
Convenience to job	40%
Closeness to shopping	25%
Access to transportation	20%
Quality of schools	19%
Affordability	7%
Born and raised in Sudbrook Park	4%
Other (varied responses)	10%

In an age when families have become increasingly mobile, Sudbrook Park is unusually stable: 42% of survey respondents have lived here more than twenty years; 61% more than ten years.

Another community meeting was held on October 9, 1997, to present an initial working draft of the Plan for community input and comments; these comments formed the basis of additional revisions. Following a PAG meeting on November 1, 1997, the Preliminary Draft of the Sudbrook Park Comprehensive Community Action Plan was submitted to Baltimore County for review on November 17, 1997. After a December 3, 1997 meeting of two PAG representatives with Councilman Kamenetz and Community Conservation Director David Fields, a decision was made to reformat the preliminary draft Plan to distinguish between County and community goals and actions, where applicable. The reformatted Plan was sent to Councilman Kamenetz and Charles R. Olsen, Director of Baltimore County's Public Works Department, for review on February 5, 1998.

After obtaining additional feedback from the County, a revised (April) draft of the Plan was distributed to Sudbrook Park residents in advance of a community input meeting, held on May 20, 1998 at the St. Charles School auditorium. About 80 persons attended, of which 2-3 presented disagreements with particular aspects of the Plan. Oral and written comments, submitted both during and subsequent to the meeting, were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the Plan. Subsequently, the Plan was revised to incorporate updated information presented at the May 20 community meeting, and to clarify or amend the prior draft to respond to suggestions of residents and County agencies.